NOTE: Email in Word or PDF format to: ettestimony@cga.ct.gov

Testimony of Deborah Roe

regarding SB 176 - AN ACT CONCERNING SHARED CLEAN ENERGY FACILITIES

The proposed bill, while on the right path in some respects, requires significant changes to become the bill that Connecticut needs.

Let's be clear—a 10MW increase in the SCEF program is a wholly inadequate response to the climate emergency that we are facing. DEEP, according to the IRP, is relying on the onboarding, a decade or more down the road, of large amounts of utility scale solar and wind to pull us out of this climate nose dive; a strategy akin to putting off studying for your bar exam until 15 minutes before you take it and hoping that you know enough to pass. This kick-the-can down the road approach will likely never get us where we need to be and, in the meantime, thousands and thousands of tons of greenhouse gasses are being emitted each year. We need action now.

The answer—the thing that benefits all of us—is staring us in the face. We need vastly more distributed energy resources [i.e. local solar and storage and all of the other resources that support the local distribution grid]. PURA should be overseeing the addition of hundreds of megawatts annually to the commercial and SCEF programs not a couple dozen megawatts. The utilities should be tasked with strengthening the support of the local distribution system so that all of these resources can come onto the grid. The state should be finding every federal dollar to make this happen so that there is no increase to ratepayers. That's always the sticking point, isn't it? The money. And that is the most common reason legislators give for not voting for more local solar. But the money is the easiest of all the problems to solve.

It is estimated that doubling the cap on commercial solar would cost the average rate payer 15 cents a month in the first year. This is less than the cost of one cup of coffee a year. First of all, you have to ask yourself if this is a significant cost amount especially when compared to the increases in transmission costs that the utilities have burdened us with, by some accounts a 750% increase since 2014. Second, if legislators can't find a way to increase local clean energy even in this small amount without passing the cost along to the ratepayers, what hope is there that they'll solve the really large problem of achieving a net zero grid?

What is needed is more creative thinking. There have got to be a least a dozen options to get this done. To start with, get rid of all gas rebates from the energy efficiency program. Reduce the cost of this program to ratepayers by the same amount. Also, refund the money that was taken from this program a few years back. Another way to support this transition would be to have a program that ratepayers who want to support clean energy (which is a great number in Connecticut) could pay into. Many of us already pay extra through Arcadia and other providers to support clean energy but we would rather support LOCAL clean energy. Another possibility is to support DER buildout through the Connecticut general fund. Why do the ratepayers have to pay? DER benefits everyone.

A proper buildout of DERs would mean hundreds of quality local jobs. Commercial businesses would have a new stream of income selling excess electricity from rooftop installations. It means that all of the municipalities that have been denied in the past could get solar thereby reducing their energy costs and keeping taxes lower. Look at the town of Bethel—just 1MW of solar over their landfill saves the town $40,000 annually in energy costs. Local solar can also translate to a huge reduction in local air pollution. Solar pairs well with clean heating and cooling systems (air source and ground source heat pumps) and can encourage this transition. And it would allow us to close gas peaker plants. Solar along with batteries provides a more flexible, resilient, and secure grid. It gives grid operators more options and, therefore, can help to level out the demand curve. Reducing these peaks is a huge cost savings. In Vermont, operators were able to call up hundreds of small residential batteries during anticipated summer peaks and saved customers millions of dollars. [Massachusetts Set to Become First State to Implement a Clean Peak Standard | Greentech Media]

There is no doubt that there will be costs initially to a DER buildout but within a decade, if done properly, this process will lead to the lowest cost grid. For more information on how this works, I urge legislators and administrators to read the study Vibrant Clean Energy Study which explains the value of DER and how it increases functionality of the electric grid and reduces costs. https://www.vibrantcleanenergy.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/WhyDERs_ES_Final.pdf

We can do this if the legislative will is there.

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